

ABA/NLADA 2007 Equal Justice Conference

Public Sector Salaries, Student Debt, and Solutions

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Program Description

How do organizations recruit and retain law graduates with high student debt loads? Join this program to learn the latest facts on law school tuition and debt, review current public interest salary data, hear about a report on the impact of the debt problem on staff retention, and find out what stakeholders (schools, employers, the legal community, etc.) are doing in response to the salary and debt problem in the public interest arena. Group discussion will follow on how public interest employers and their funders can support the creation and improvement of compensation and financial assistance programs and hire/retain today's debt-burdened law graduates.

Topical Outline

- I. Identifying the Issues
 - A. Review of Rapid Rise in Law School Tuition and Student Debt Loads in Recent Past (see Appendix A)
 1. More students borrow to pay for four-year college degrees
 2. Tuition and debt data from ABA Section of Legal Education & Admission to the Bar
(<http://www.abanet.org/legaled/statistics/stats.html>)
 3. Lower cost options less available as tuition gap narrows between public and private law school tuition

4. Debt data from NALP's 'After the JD' longitudinal study of year 2000 bar admittees
- B. Comparative Review of Public Sector Salary Data (see Appendices A & B), Drawn From:
1. NALP 2006 Public Sector/Public Interest Attorney Salary Report
 2. NALP Employment and Salary Report
 3. NALP 2005 Jobs & JD's report
- C. The Impact of High Debt and Low Salaries: The Hard Truth About New Public Service Lawyers' Available Income (see Appendix C)
- D. Review of Chicago Bar Foundation/Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice 2006 Report - 'Investing in Justice: A Framework for Effective Recruitment and Retention of Illinois Legal Aid Attorneys' (see Appendix D)
- E. Preliminary (Informal) Findings from NLADA Civil Policy Group Recruitment/Retention 2006 Survey Data
1. Nationwide survey of civil legal services attorney age 35 or younger
 2. Purpose: to ascertain what issues influence young attorneys decisions regarding employment with legal aid firms
 3. 786 total respondents, 80% of whom are staff attorneys with civil legal services or closely-related organizations
 4. 90% of respondents to a student debt question graduated law school with some educational debt. Two-thirds of this 90% has over \$60,000 in educational debt.
 5. 64.3% of respondents to a question about paying off educational debt indicated that it will take at least 15 years to repay. 44.4% estimate they won't repay educational debt in less than 25 years
 6. Educational debt is the main financial obligation of most respondents. Respondents, on the whole, are concerned about not being able to take on additional financial responsibilities (children, homeownership, etc.). Some struggle just to meet monthly obligations.
 7. 52% of respondents to a question about their employers' recruitment/retentions situation indicated it was among the employers' top three overall challenges
 8. Written answers about the most important changes their programs should make suggest that salary levels, long-term salary planning, LRAP funds are among the respondents' top concerns

II. Generating the Solutions

- A. Improving Salaries for legal aid and public interest lawyers
1. The Illinois example (see Appendices D & E)
 2. Update on the New Hampshire effort

3. Other efforts around the country/IOLTA
- B. NLADA Civil Policy Group – Recruitment Retention Committee drafting report based on 2006 survey (see I, D above) – a subcommittee is completing its findings/recommendations. NLADA intends to make a final report publicly available in mid-2007.
- C. Loan Repayment Assistance Programs
 1. Update on law school programs and activity (see Financing the Future 2006, Appendix F)
 - a. More than 100 schools have LRAPs
 - b. Public interest scholarships and fellowships increasing
 - c. Many programs provide relatively modest benefits
 - d. Fundraising emphasis needed
 2. Update on statewide and local programs (see Illinois LRAP programs, Appendices G & H, and ABA LRAP charts, Appendix I)
 3. Update on federal legislative activity, including LSC LRAP
 4. Update on employer activity
 5. How do stakeholders from these different groups communicate to avoid duplication of efforts?
- D. Group Discussion/Q&A

Appendices

- A. Data on student debt and public sector salaries from various ABA and NALP sources
- B. Excerpts from the *NALP 2006 Public Sector & Public Interest Attorney Salary Report*
- C. *The Hard Truth about the Impact of High Debt and Low Public Service Salaries* – Equal Justice Works flier
- D. *Investing in Justice: A Framework for Effective Recruitment and Retention of Illinois Legal Aid Attorneys* – 2006 report from the Chicago Bar Foundation and Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice
- E. *CBF Investing in Justice Campaign is Launched to Address Legal Aid Crisis* - 2/13/07 Chicago Bar Foundation Press Release
- F. *Financing the Future: Responses to the Rising Debt of Law Students* – 2006 Equal Justice Works report
- G. Chicago Bar Foundation Sun-Times Public Interest Lawyer Fellowship Program
- H. Kimball R. and Karen Gatsis Anderson Public Interest Law Fellowship – 2007 Application Guidelines (administered by the Chicago Bar Foundation)
- I. Summaries of Statewide LRAPs, ABA Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants